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Allies Reject Neutrals in Troop Talks

BRUSSELS, Jan. 24 (UPI)—The Western Allies sent notes to the Warsaw Pact nations today rejecting a Communist suggestion that neutral nations be invited to exploratory talks on East-West troop cuts in Europe.

The notes offered to discuss the issue later, after the talks—formally known as Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions—actually begin. But a NATO official said, "They won't get a very warm response," even then.

The NATO notes asked for a prompt response. Officials said the speed and nature of the answer would tell whether the Communists really want force reduction talks to move forward. NATO has insisted on a link between progress in the troop talks and in the European security talks already being discussed in Helsinki.

The troop reduction talks are still scheduled to begin Jan. 31, but with only a week to go and the issue on the neutrals not yet settled, doubt has grown that the date can be met. Western officials said, however, that a delay of "a few days" would make no difference.

Moscow and Washington agreed in September that the talks should open Jan. 31 in Geneva between seven NATO nations and five Warsaw Pact nations—the countries with troops in Central Europe. NATO accordingly issued a formal invitation in November and said it expected quick acceptance. The Warsaw Pact's delayed answer came last Thursday, and threw the situation into confusion. It accepted the Jan. 31 date, but said the talks should be held in Vienna with all "interested" nations having "equal participation."

The NATO notes said the West still prefers Geneva, but would accept Vienna if arrangements could be made in time.